# The Learning Community in Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal Education
Provincial Advisory
Committee

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## *Acknowledgements*

This report is dedicated to the outstanding leadership of Gloria Mehlmann who served Aboriginal children and youth and the betterment of their learning opportunities throughout her career. Formation of the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee as a body representative of the Aboriginal community and education partners is one of her many successes. Gloria retired from Saskatchewan Learning in November 2004. The department extends its appreciation to Ms. Mehlmann and to the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC).

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## *Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC)*

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) is the longest standing committee providing advice to Saskatchewan Learning and the provincial education system. It was originally established as the Native Curriculum Review Committee and later as the Indian and Métis Educational Advisory Committee (IMEAC). In the *Five-Year Action Plan for Native Curriculum Development (1984)*, the role of the committee is described as having a dual focus, "*Where possible, Native curriculum should coincide and be integrated with provincial program development. At the same time special programs to meet the particular needs of Native students should be created.*" The committee assisted in the major curriculum revision process that led to the provincial Core Curriculum and to the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in all subject areas.

AEPAC's focus has been "*fixed on children*" rather than on jurisdiction. This priority for Aboriginal children and youth has led to positive communication among First Nations, Métis peoples, school divisions, service delivery agencies, the federal government, and Saskatchewan Learning. Today, members of First Nations communities are represented on the committee by appointment through the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations directors of education. Membership is also representative of the Aboriginal teacher education programs, the major provincial educational partner organizations, Community Schools, Aboriginal institutions, and Saskatchewan Learning.

The diverse membership of AEPAC provides a knowledgeable context and confident sharing of responsibility in advancing the educational agenda for all children. This creates a healthy, energetic collaboration among partner organizations in Saskatchewan.

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The direction and perspective of AEPAC is reflected in School$^{PLUS}$; an initiative that can serve to achieve AEPAC's goals and at the same time be strengthened by AEPAC's understanding and perspectives. The policy framework *Building Partnerships: First Nations and Métis Peoples and the Provincial Education System (2003)* is also supportive of AEPAC directions that focus on enhanced relationships.

## *Preface*

*The Learning Community in Aboriginal Education: 2004-2007 Priorities Report* is an interim report on progress being made on the *AEPAC Action Plan 2000-2005* and sets out priorities for 2004-2007.

AEPAC's action plan sets out a two-part goal for Aboriginal education:

- Aboriginal young people complete grade 12 and post-secondary education, flourishing in all professions; and,
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and young people are knowledgeable about Aboriginal peoples and their history.

The Committee acknowledges that this goal has not yet been achieved. However, progress is being made and AEPAC remains confident that challenges will be overcome and its goals will be realized.

Committee member Ralph Paul, Director of Education for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and member of English River Dene Nation, related the perspective of a Dene Elder describing change as a river. It starts small, grows as it joins other streams, sometimes eddies and runs backwards, flows around and sometimes over obstacles, churns and roils as it gathers speed but evens out to a smooth, wide, and even calm flow, as it nears the sea ... its final destination. Just as the stream flows into a river and reaches the sea, Aboriginal education and the success of First Nations and Métis students, is growing and broadening. Many are successful now and in the future all will flourish. All students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal will come to appreciate their shared histories and respective cultures.

The Committee's report on progress charts the river's flow and points as far as we can see toward the next bend in its course. The report affirms the *Action Plan 2000-2005* vision, principles and key areas of recommendation and establishes new priorities for 2005-2007.

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## *Introduction*

AEPAC holds a vision for education that sees all learners gaining understanding and appreciation for Aboriginal peoples. The vision is that all Aboriginal learners will flourish and progress in each and every school they attend.

In 1999, the committee developed its action plan for 2000-2005, articulating 17 recommendations that required focused attention. At that time, the Minister of Education renewed government's commitment to Aboriginal education in light of the urgent needs of First Nations and Métis students.

Two major achievements had been reached since work began in the early 1980s. First, good progress had been made at the organizational level. The education partners were committed to improving the learning experiences of First Nations and Métis students and partnerships among organizations had been established. And second, new policy and the expansion of programs, such as the Community School Program and the Indian and Métis Education Development Program added strength. Yet, the committee felt it was not seeing the desired results and it was apparent that there remained an urgent need for action at the school level.

A more comprehensive approach had to be defined and the focus of efforts had to be at the school level.

A more comprehensive approach had to be defined and the focus of efforts had to be at the school level. This was consistent with the emerging view that change is best supported by building capacity at the community and school level and lending support to students through their schools and in their homes.

In its *Action Plan 2000 - 2005*, AEPAC focused on goals to address the challenge:

- *Aboriginal young people complete grade 12 and post-secondary education, flourishing in all professions.*
- *Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and young people are knowledgeable about Aboriginal peoples and their history.*

The committee developed principles that provided a way of looking at and responding to the challenges and their implications:

- Aboriginal worldview is a valid way of knowing and understanding the world;
- Accountability is essential to progress;

- Communication throughout the system is key to the achievement of common goals;
- Quality and authenticity are essential considerations in all Aboriginal education policy and program initiatives; and,
- All people must have equitable opportunities to succeed and contribute. Respect for individual experiences and knowledge is paramount.

AEPAC identified four areas of recommendation to focus change at the school level. These four areas represent dimensions in teaching and learning that have a strong influence for change in the school community and include:

- Cultural Affirmation and School Climate;
- Shared Decision-Making;
- Core Curriculum Actualization; and,
- Life Long Learning.

Successful schools are *culturally affirming* places of learning for all students. Students learn better when their environment strengthens a positive sense of identity. Security and pride in belonging nurtures motivation to learn. Parents and community, active in *shared decision-making*, add new capacity to the life of the school.

Saskatchewan's Core Curriculum is nationally recognized as one of Canada's finest. Its inclusive philosophy is realized when all schools actively teach its instructional objectives to all students as intended. Only then is the curriculum *actualized*. Beyond the formal aspects of *life long learning*, informal ways of learning are important considerations. Schools are encouraged to look within the community to access historical and contemporary cultural knowledge and important current issues and to include this in the learning program. As a component of life long learning, the committee encouraged schools to set benchmarks, and to evaluate and celebrate their progress in Aboriginal education for all students. Accountability and carefully measured assessment of all dimensions of student achievement remain essential for progress.

The Committee encouraged schools to set benchmarks and to evaluate their progress in Aboriginal education for all students.

In 2003, the committee re-affirmed its goals, vision and principles and began its work to define priorities for 2005-2007 in each of the four areas of recommendation.

## *Assessing Progress*

Developments achieved in education over the past twenty years opened a floodgate of bold ideas and new tools aimed at school improvement. Among these were policy guidelines and models for strengthening school relationships, leadership training, visionary materials for the adoption of technology, an expanded and flexible Core Curriculum, and new government-supported research on teaching and learning. Aboriginal education was well supported by initiatives to build capacity and enhance professional practice.

It was clear that not all schools in Saskatchewan were fully engaged in improving educational success of Aboriginal students.

However, it was clear that not all schools in Saskatchewan were fully engaged in improving educational success of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal student achievement and school completion had improved but continued to lag behind that of non-Aboriginal students.

The committee chose not to be discouraged. Instead, it focused on gains that demonstrated opportunities for building cooperation and student success. This was a time to review the course of developments, to build on growing strengths and to adjust targets and directions.

## *A Decade of Change and Accomplishment*

AEPAC reviewed recent accomplishments and considered what each might mean for future developments in teaching and learning in Saskatchewan.

### The Core Curriculum

- The Core Curriculum is recognized as a central feature of the provincial education system. It is a curriculum that creates spaces for Aboriginal voices, well beyond the Native Studies program. Integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum, within all subject areas is the goal for all students.

- Schools continue to reach out for instructional and learning resources that have been developed in collaboration with Aboriginal people. A shared approach to building resource centre collections in schools that consist of high quality teaching and learning materials is being pursued across the system. These resources have strong potential for making a qualitative difference in the lives of all learners.

- Professional development for teachers and school administrators in Aboriginal education is strongly supported. AEPAC developed a

rubric for self-assessment by schools that is now a part of *A Time for Significant Leadership,* which provides a process to guide the development of local indicators of progress in Aboriginal education for schools seeking to lead and track improvements.

- Teachers and school administrators are taking responsibility for preparing themselves to deal with the challenges that are a part of meeting the diverse needs of their students. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has reflected the desire of the teaching profession to support individual student success through policy, resources and its Code of Ethics.

## Partnership Arrangements

- Creative partnership arrangements, promoted in *Building Partnerships: First Nations and Métis Peoples and the Provincial Education System (2003)*, are leading innovation and improved learning opportunities. The range of innovative partnerships attest to what Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are increasingly able to develop together through cooperation and sustained commitment.

Creative partnership arrangements are leading innovation and improved learning opportunities.

- Aboriginal cultures, histories, and languages are interwoven in all aspects of the learning programs in schools that are co-managed in partnership arrangements. These schools are now looking at the design and delivery of the curriculum to ensure the learning program meets student needs.

- Interest in revitalizing, retaining and enhancing Aboriginal languages continues to increase. The spoken and written language of a people is recognized as an important and dynamic aspect of culture and identity. Aboriginal language curriculum development is progressing steadily in partnership with First Nations and other provinces.

The Western/Northern Canadian Protocol is a national partnership aimed at increasing collaboration towards a variety of areas in Aboriginal Education. The preservation and enhancement of Aboriginal languages is a matter of national pride and honour.

## Expansion of Program Supports

- The Community Schools Program underwent a renewal and revitalization with the release of *Building Communities of Hope* in 1996. The program has since been expanded to include many more schools, including rural, northern and Kindergarten through Grade 12 schools. To date there are 98 Community Schools in Saskatchewan. Community Schools seek to provide a culturally-affirming learning climate and engage in strong partnerships with families and communities.

- Community Education in all schools is a key component of School[PLUS].

- Since Prekindergarten programming was introduced in 1996-97 in Community Schools, additional funding has been made available to support 100 Prekindergarten Programs.

- The Indian and Métis Education Development (IMED) Program continues to support innovative, responsive, culturally-affirming programming at the school level. In 1999, a special component of IMED, the Aboriginal Elder/Outreach Program, was introduced.

- First Nations and Tribal Councils are beginning to participate in initiatives such as Assessment for Learning and the Student Tracking System, providing necessary data to inform improved programs and services.

## Organizational Commitment

Through action and policy statement, the educational partners express strong commitment to improving outcomes for all students.

- Increased communication and progress is evident at the organizational level. Through action and policy, the educational partners express strong commitment to improving outcomes for all students.

- There is Aboriginal representation on policy and curriculum reference committees. The proactive contributions and voices of Aboriginal people are valued at these tables.

- Within teacher education, programs emphasize the importance of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives. Specific courses of study focusing on First Nation and Métis cultures and contributions are integral to the University of Saskatchewan ITEP and Gabriel Dumont SUNTEP programs. The First Nations University of Canada provides a wealth of support.

- Governments (provincial, Aboriginal, federal, territorial) are becoming increasingly interested in outcomes. Saskatchewan's Education Indicators report provides a biannual snapshot of programs toward Saskatchewan's Goals of Education. Tribal Councils are implementing assessment and evaluation initiatives to support improved education outcomes.

- The call for proactive school boards is loud and clear and has been heard. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association has ensured representative Aboriginal voice in educational decision making within the organization to support and guide a broad range of Aboriginal education policy initiatives.

An environment of renewed hope and energy has been created by the development and implementation of a Core Curriculum that embraces Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives, establishment of genuine partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, and focused commitment of key educational stakeholders.

## *A Rapidly Changing Educational Context*

The challenges for schools are not only educational. Changing demographics and social conditions for Aboriginal families and children strengthen the rationale for improving educational success. At the same time, the growth in partnership arrangements leads the agenda for change and improvement.

### Demographics and Social Conditions

- Overall, there were 130,185 Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan in 2001, an increase of 17% from 1996. The First Nations population was 83,745, up 15% from 1996, and there were 43,695 Métis people, an increase of 21.9% from 1996. This is the second highest proportion (13.52%) of Aboriginal people among the provinces.

- The median age of Aboriginal people (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) in Saskatchewan is 20.1 compared to 38.8 for the non-Aboriginal population. First Nations people in Saskatchewan have an even lower median age of 18.4 indicating they are youngest among the three Aboriginal groups.

- The proportion of Aboriginal children and youth under 15 was 39.6%, down from 42% in 1996. This change reflects a slightly lower Aboriginal birth rate in 2001 than in 1996.

- In Saskatchewan, 25% of all children and youth under 14 are Aboriginal.

- One in five (22%) Aboriginal people in Canada moved in the year prior to the census compared to 14% of non-Aboriginal people.

In Saskatchewan, 25% of all children and youth under 14 are Aboriginal.

These Statistics Canada population statistics reveal that Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, as a group, are younger and more mobile than non-Aboriginal peoples. These understandings formed a central focus for committee deliberation about priorities.

## Growth of Partnerships

AEPAC believes that the commitment of all educational partners to Aboriginal education is necessary for significant change. As relationships between First Nations education systems and the provincial education systems develop, a tremendous range of organizational, program and project-based governance arrangements and partnerships is being established.

*Organizational Partnerships*

Increasingly, boards of education see Aboriginal education and community partnerships as a priority.

- The leadership work of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association is helping to enhance local educational governance. Increasingly, boards of education see Aboriginal education and community partnerships as a priority.

- The Meadow Lake School Division and Flying Dust First Nation agreement ensures that Aboriginal cultures, languages, and histories are taught in schools where inclusive boards support shared decisions in shared facilities.

- The Battlefords Tribal Council, Battlefords School Division and North West Catholic School Division jointly operate the Sākewēw High School as a separate entity focused on enhancing Aboriginal success.

- First Nations are represented on AEPAC and other provincial decision-making committees.

- Saskatchewan Learning is now an integrated organization inclusive of Pre-Kindergarten, K-12, post-secondary, and libraries. This allows for a higher degree of responsiveness to communities in their attempts to link various service agencies in supportive ways.

*Program Partnerships*

- The Regina Public School Division has an agreement with the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council and O-Tee-Paym-Soo-Wuk Métis Local to review and revise the learning programs of Albert Elementary School and Scott Collegiate.

- There is a growing strength in the long term partnership work of the universities and the Aboriginal teacher education programs. This is beneficial to future curriculum implementation and to teacher professional practice.

- The Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon Public and Roman Catholic School Divisions, and the City of Saskatoon support the White Buffalo Youth Lodge elementary and secondary classrooms for students who have been out of school for more than three months.

- The Saskatchewan Valley School Division, Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation, Mistawasis First Nation and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation emphasizes a shared commitment to learner success.

*Project Partnerships and Initiatives*

- The partnership between Saskatchewan Learning and the Office of the Treaty Commissioner delivers outcomes-based in-service on *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* to schools.

- Corporate interest in and support of Aboriginal education is increasing as evidenced by Weyerhaeuser Company's financial support for Community Schools.

- There is a growing call for the voice and leadership development of youth. Aboriginal youth know their circumstances best and have valuable ideas to contribute.

Through School$^{PLUS}$, schools are encouraged to engage youth in new ways.

The profound positive impact of the partnership policy direction makes it a central element in the committee's consideration of priority initiatives.

## *Consensus on Direction*

The past 50 years have witnessed a major change in orientation – a change that seeks to create, together as equal partners, a shared and harmonious future.

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Sixty years ago in Saskatchewan there was both school board and parent opposition to the attendance of Métis children in local schools. Later, in the mid-1950s, schools aimed their energies at integrating Aboriginal students.

A decade later, change to provincial legislation created a Northern School Board that was later established under the same legislative framework and with the same local management and taxation responsibilities as all other Saskatchewan school boards. Since that time there have been annual developments in curriculum, policy and government direction for community involvement and genuine Aboriginal participation in provincial planning and local educational governance.

This emphasis on equity is found in *Our Children - Keepers of the Sacred Knowledge, Final Report of the Minister's National Working Group on Education (2002)*. The report states "We ... believe that strong cultural identity and equally strong individual academic performance will create First Nations citizens who will walk with ease and confidence in two worlds."

There is a great distance to go. The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS) study *Learning About Walking in Beauty, Placing Aboriginal Perspectives in Canadian Classrooms (2002)*, written in collaboration with and published by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), expressed concern that there are still too few opportunities for students to learn and indicated "... every student should be taught about the history and the past relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the settlers".

A CAAS survey found that Canadian students lack basic information about Aboriginal people. The students surveyed attributed their lack of knowledge to their schooling.

In *Our Children - Keepers of the Sacred Knowledge* it is understood that "Schools can play a pivotal role in transforming the relationship between First Nations and Canadian society." From the perspective of AEPAC, the presence and destructive force of racism is best addressed when teachers and the educational community foster an attitude of inquiry, fact-finding and understanding. The work of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in developing the resource *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* and in providing teacher professional development is a very positive step.

The failure to teach this content is equally harmful to non-Aboriginal as well as Aboriginal students all of whom must now walk in many worlds.

AEPAC has strongly encouraged incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing and historical and contemporary cultures and perspectives into the development and delivery of Saskatchewan's curriculum. The failure to teach this content is equally harmful to non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students, all of whom must now walk in many worlds.

The Auditor General of Canada, in the *2000 Auditor General's Report,* compares provincial and First Nation student success and in setting out ideas for improvement writes that, "We believe that success in providing education to Indian students can be achieved only if their needs and aspirations are appropriately identified and served by an education system that is designed to meet them."

AEPAC believes that Saskatchewan's policy environment for cooperation, at all levels of government and across the education system, is creating effective mechanisms that support partnership efforts with the Aboriginal community and between governments.

This is especially characteristic of the work of the provincial Task Force on the Role of the School. In its report, *School*[PLUS] *A Vision for Children and Youth: Toward a New School, Community and Human Service Partnership in Saskatchewan: Final Report of The Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School,* the Task Force states:

> Historians often refer to the period when the first Europeans arrived in North America as the 'contact era'. ... Today we have an era of 're-contact' that is at least as significant as the fur trade, except that its context is primarily education.

In addressing the complex range of needs so many children now bring to school the Task Force recommended, "The ideal is the creation of a School[PLUS] model-school as the community hub offering a diverse range of services and supports for students."

AEPAC concurs with this vision and believes that as the system's new policy direction, School[PLUS] offers the greatest hope for supporting children's aspirations and meeting their health, social and justice challenges.

AEPAC believes that lasting and positive approaches are, indeed, making their presence felt and that everyone has a role to play: the school, the teacher, the community leader, the board, the individual trustee, the administrator, the service provider, youth, and parents. Each must help steer the course with careful, well-informed and thoughtful participation and guidance.

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## *Opportunities*

As AEPAC looked to the future and how resources could be focused on priorities for action, the strengths of the system were explored. The committee sought to ensure the learning needs of all Aboriginal children would be met and that each would succeed academically and, in the longer term, economically and socially. The committee found much promise.

**First Nations and Métis education has moved to the center of organizational agendas at both federal and provincial levels** – There must be a continuing respect for the unique identities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Histories, languages, cultures, and values are the lifeblood of identity and the unique identities of the Métis, the First Nations, and the Inuit need to be consistently re-affirmed.

**Aboriginal communities want direct involvement in the education of their children** – Families seek to be engaged with their children's learning and want to partner with their schools to build capacity within their communities and better serve the needs of their children. Families appreciate the support of a caring and capable school at the center of their community.

Saskatchewan uses innovative and inclusive models of policy development, models that are sought after in other provinces and other countries.

**Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis organizations and Saskatchewan Learning are recognized nationally as cutting-edge leaders in Aboriginal education** – Saskatchewan's innovative and inclusive models of policy development are sought after in other provinces and other countries. The educational relationships currently being forged across the system provide a strong foundation for school divisions, First Nations, Tribal Councils and Métis organizations to establish new partnerships aimed at achieving measurable outcomes and lasting results.

**Aboriginal education is a major priority in Saskatchewan Learning and all branches of the department are working on First Nations and Métis issues** – Fundamental policy questions are being addressed thoughtfully and respectfully. Attendance of provincial children at schools on reserves, joint governance of high schools, fostering Aboriginal parent influence in what their children learn, and ensuring more teachers are teaching Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives that are a part of the provincial curriculum are being addressed thoughtfully and respectfully. Generations of mistrust must be overcome for people to cooperate in new ways for better outcomes but, with informed policy

guidance sensitive to First Nations and Métis interests, each of these policy issues can and will be successfully addressed.

**There is more in-depth media coverage of accomplishments and needs** – The Saskatchewan media is placing a higher priority on public awareness and news items that provide insight into understanding Aboriginal life in Canada.

**There is growing pride among First Nations and Métis students resulting from having 'a place in the curriculum'** – The opportunities for positive change emerge from the recognized importance of Aboriginal education and its place on the agenda for improvement. Saskatchewan's recent history of energy and commitment to improvement of Aboriginal children's educational success, the growing understanding of and sensitivity to Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy, and the genuine desire of parents to support and guide their children's learning establish a strong foundation for action.

## *Renewed Priorities*

There is a bright future based on shared strengths with a common set of goals and a clear sense of direction that embraces the aspirations of all children, families and communities. The committee review affirmed the principles that guided the *Action Plan: 2000-2005*. The meaning and intention of the first principle "Aboriginal worldview is a valid way of knowing and understanding the world", however, is expanded to ensure the curriculum and instructional practices honour Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogy as being both dynamic and complex.

There is a bright future based on shared strengths with a common set of goals and a clear sense of direction that embraces the aspirations of all children, families and communities.

AEPAC values both First Nations and provincial education systems and seeks to draw the systems closer together to benefit all learners. AEPAC envisions the systems sharing mechanisms to support student mobility and that we become a learning community committed to students and excellence together.

To this end, the Committee is guided by a new ethic that directs us to "Acknowledge jurisdictional responsibilities while valuing shared planning and action."

These findings and principles, together with the foundational components of the *Action Plan 2000-2005* guide renewed action in the four key areas of recommendation:

- Cultural Affirmation and School Climate;

- Shared Decision-Making;
- Core Curriculum Actualization; and,
- Life Long Learning.

The Committee included School$^{PLUS}$ as a further key area. Implementation of School$^{PLUS}$ as a provincial priority occurred following development of the *Action Plan* and the Committee recognizes the strong relationship between its priorities and this new initiative.

## 1. Cultural Affirmation and School Climate

Every student benefits from learning Aboriginal content and perspectives outlined in the provincial Core Curriculum.

Schools and communities must be encouraged to develop healthy and productive relationships that are the hallmark of a positive learning environment. Every student benefits from learning about Aboriginal content and perspectives as outlined in the provincial Core Curriculum. The committee recommends that Saskatchewan Learning strengthen its policy related to cultural affirmation and positive school climate. Policy decisions and school plans must be guided by the positive impact they have on student self-esteem and personal well-being.

Through this affirmation, each student's identity is reinforced and students may find they have much in common and much to appreciate and learn from each other's communities. Cultural affirmation is more than reversing negatives; it is about all children walking 'with ease and confidence' in many worlds.

Practically, it is essential for schools to find ways to manage student transitions. These periods of stress interfere with learning. Resultant behavioural issues pose threats to both students and school climate. Schools need to work with parents and the community to help everyone see the learner holistically. Students need appropriate counseling and cultural teachings but they also need ways to re-enter, or stay in, the system. This includes literacy programs, tutoring, support in dealing with life issues, access to Elders, and personal and career counseling.

In Aboriginal communities, it is recognized that students can have unique transitional periods at almost any age. Student supports can be designed in consultation with parents and community and then provided during these times. The spiritual development of students is important and ' celebrated. Also, by aiming to implement unconditional commitment policy, the school community can begin to define and make available its integrated supports.

Schools must also help students plan for employment. Structural changes have to occur in order to allow the school community and the private sector to work together. The school plays a significant role in meeting tomorrow's workforce requirements. With large numbers of Aboriginal youth poised to enter the world of work, steps must be taken to prepare them to assume their place in tomorrow's work force. These choices include success in a range of careers. It is important for schools to recognize that partnering with business is legitimate and positive. But schools also have the obligation to fulfill a promise to young people that a comprehensive learning program will always be the focal point.

With large numbers of Aboriginal youth poised to enter the world of work, steps must be taken to prepare them to assume their place in tomorrow's work force. These choices include success in a range of careers.

A stark record of Aboriginal under-representation in the math and science-based professions and in the workforce can be addressed through focused action and cooperation among learning institutions and employers. Research is needed to determine effect of the instructional strategies to promote success in mathematics and the sciences. The factors that come into play in creating a child's reluctance or inability to succeed in mathematics or science must be determined. AEPAC is concerned that we may "label" children as mathematics or language-delayed and miss the underlying root causes.

Teachers' beliefs, expectations and actions are instrumental to the achievement of these priorities. Anecdotally the Saskatchewan educational community has acknowledged that the success of Aboriginal students is improved when there are teachers of Aboriginal ancestry in their schools. The Aboriginal teacher education programs in Saskatchewan are essential to improving the number of Aboriginal teachers employed by public and separate school divisions. These include:

- The Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan funded by the Federal Government and First Nations;
- The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) funded by Saskatchewan Learning and administered through a cooperative agreement with the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research and the Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan with campuses located in Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina;
- The Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), primarily funded by Saskatchewan Learning as well as the Federal Government, First Nations and Tribal Councils and operated at LaRonge by the NORTEP Council through a cooperative arrangement with the

Northern Lights School Division and the Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina; and,

- First Nations University of Canada Indian Education program with campuses in Saskatoon and Regina funded by the Federal Government and Saskatchewan Learning.

These programs also offer opportunities for the universities to enhance elementary and secondary teacher education programs by drawing on the knowledge and experience of staff within the Aboriginal teacher education programs to lend instructional support. Every effort must be made to expand these programs to meet the growing need for teachers of Aboriginal ancestry.

These developments, in addition to the school's door remaining open to Aboriginal parents and the school community generally, can help to add to the supportive and inviting environment that most schools seek to demonstrate.

*Priorities:*

- ***Support the development of teacher confidence** in actualizing Aboriginal content and perspectives.*
- ***Expand and enhance Saskatchewan Aboriginal teacher education programs** to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers.*
- ***Develop mutual pride and respect** in students.*
- ***Manage transitions holistically** to improve student retention.*
- ***Partner with business and community for student employment planning** as one aspect of life long learning.*
- ***Identify success factors** for mathematics and the sciences.*

## 2. Shared Decision-Making

AEPAC recommends that Saskatchewan Learning increase Aboriginal representation at all levels and that partnerships be developed and strengthened.

Saskatchewan Learning has participated in dialogue with the federal government and First Nations communities as represented by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to define new ways to deal with governance considerations. There is agreement that through this dialogue the long-standing treaty relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nations will not be eroded as new partnership arrangements are established.

Development of relationships and new partnerships with the Métis and the Inuit will take their own course. But regardless of approach, it is paramount that the goals of partnerships continue to serve the best educational interests of all children.

AEPAC believes there are opportunities to build capacity through school boards that consist primarily of trustees who are of Aboriginal ancestry and has observed that it is increasingly acceptable among Aboriginal people to participate in school board elections. Enabling legislation and policy are needed to assist school boards to develop new models with Aboriginal peoples to enhance their engagement in shared decision making. Visionary and proactive school boards believe that, ideally, Aboriginal board members who share decision making on matters impacting school programming and operations need to do so legitimately.

Enabling legislation and policy are needed to assist school boards to develop new models with Aboriginal peoples to enhance their engagement in shared decision-making.

AEPAC believes, too, that shared board powers should extend to the joint operation of holistic models to meet not only the learning needs of students, but also the *living needs* of street children and homeless families. With or without enabling legislative authority, boards and their administrators are seeking to establish service delivery models that reflect present day community realities.

There is also greater opportunity for Aboriginal professionals to make stronger connections to the teaching profession through the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and facilitate a smoother transition between the First Nation and provincial education systems. All teachers need opportunities to learn about their changing role as schools reach out to and engage the community in planning, decision making and program delivery.

AEPAC seeks long term partnerships between the school and the Aboriginal communities that result in a community of learning where parents, children, youth and teachers learn together and from each other. A direct correlation exists between parental involvement in the school and student success. Means must be found for all schools to engage parents and families in their children's education and in the life of the school and community.

***Priorities:***

- ***Strengthen school boards*** *through enabling legislation and opportunities to share positive experience. Strategies to obtain Aboriginal representation on boards must be identified and implemented.*
- ***Provide partnership models, guidelines and policy*** *that reflect present day community realities.*

- ***Strengthen school community relations*** *for parental and student participation and community involvement.*
- ***Review regulatory systems*** *to achieve greater parity and potential for professional exchange.*
- ***Support professional development*** *and capacity building at the school level.*

## 3. Curriculum Actualization

AEPAC strongly recommends that Saskatchewan Learning facilitate the development of and access to practical instructional and learning resources that are respectful of Aboriginal cultures. Teachers need support in their efforts to actualize Aboriginal content and perspectives. Saskatchewan Learning needs to strengthen teacher professional development to actualize the curriculum, provide mechanisms for charting progress, develop a comprehensive plan for language and culture programs, and to support development of connections between programs in schools, communities, and the work place.

Where schools are mistaken that Aboriginal content and perspectives are a curriculum 'add on' and not an integrated goal, their understanding needs to be changed. Where there is a lack of voice for Aboriginal education leadership, ways to encourage dialogue such as around introduction of Aboriginal languages need to be found. The educational community can support the building of teacher confidence by enabling their growth in knowledge. Universities are more convinced that Aboriginal content is important in all classes and this can build competence and sensitivity for teachers who are destined to teach an integrated curriculum. As a beginning point, education faculty and students might be 'mandated' to take coursework in Aboriginal history and culture while the university as a whole could begin its work of incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into their courses of study.

The educational community can support the building of teacher confidence by enabling their growth in knowledge.

***Priorities:***

- ***Build administrator and teacher commitment and capacity*** *to integrate Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in all areas of study as intended.*
- ***Develop policy with provincial educational partners*** *requiring all high school graduates to have a minimum of one Native Studies credit within the current 24-credit requirement, giving them a basic knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and their history.*
- ***Facilitate development*** *of and access to practical and accurate instructional and learning resources.*

- ***Design comprehensive plans*** *to chart progress in Aboriginal languages and culture programs in schools and classrooms.*
- ***Strengthen policy*** *to support teacher education programs and university course development that includes Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives.*

## 4. Life Long Learning

AEPAC recommends that Saskatchewan Learning promote respect for Aboriginal perspectives on life long learning. In this regard, AEPAC is encouraged by the opportunity to structure a community of learning that would support growth in understanding of Aboriginal educational thought and pedagogy. Ways of being and ways of knowing share common characteristics. A starting place might be to look at language immersion programs and the factors that make these successful.

AEPAC is encouraged by the opportunity to structure a community of learning that would support growth in understanding of Aboriginal perspectives on life long learning.

Aboriginal learning is experiential in nature. Elders are responsible for maintaining and sharing traditional knowledge for future generations. Traditional storytelling engages students in learning culture and beliefs. Aboriginal languages provide the most direct means to impart unique knowledge. Importantly, AEPAC regards teaching of Aboriginal languages as an appropriate way to teach culture. Aboriginal languages need to be validated and appreciated.

Elders chosen for their wisdom and experience have an important continuing role in Aboriginal society. Certification of Elders provides an opportunity that benefits teaching and learning. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council has provided for certification of their Elders to support the school program. Saskatchewan Learning now provides probationary teacher certificates.

Valuing the identity of Aboriginal children in school is important. As with children of all backgrounds, teachers who celebrate with Aboriginal students and their families come to appreciate the importance, value and excitement of traditional ceremonies and cultural events.

***Priorities:***

- ***Structure a community of learning*** *aimed at adoption of Aboriginal educational thought and practice.*
- ***Set instructional certification standards*** *appropriate to the demands of Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogy.*
- ***Prepare a comprehensive report*** *on Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan.*

## 5. School[PLUS]

The present array of government policy documents, curricula, guidebooks, and information items, unfortunately, does not come with a plan for setting priorities. Schools know they have to make choices.

The school, as a learning community, has extra demands placed on it and professional development and change opportunities compete for time and attention. Saskatchewan Learning supports a number of new initiatives to help schools prepare for their emerging role in today's society. The present array of government policy documents, curricula, guidebooks, and information items, unfortunately, does not come with a plan for setting priorities. Schools know they have to make choices. Yet best ways to do this are not easily discernible and it is difficult to make in-service choices among School[PLUS], Community Development Initiatives, Special Needs, Core Curriculum Actualization, Aboriginal Education, Aboriginal Partnership Policy, Assessment for Learning, and Technological Literacy.

AEPAC believes this stream of supports is crucial. The committee advises, however, that there is strong reason to align developments. In this light, the School[PLUS] initiative is regarded as a support for alignment between community-based developments and integrated services. The Effective Practices Framework articulated in the School[PLUS] initiative provides direction for selecting focus activities by the school or school division.

AEPAC is encouraged that Saskatchewan Learning puts partnering first on its economic and social development agenda. The department has created policy and structure to enable cooperation through partnership. The focus on sustainability and accountability articulated in School[PLUS] creates the basis for shared ideas and results. AEPAC values the potential within the Aboriginal Elders/Outreach Program that provides for Elders in residence, liaison workers and cultural advisors. Supports such as these help school divisions and schools set and act on their local Aboriginal education priorities. Longer term funding would strengthen the sustainability of this program.

***Priorities:***

- ***Imbed and integrate Aboriginal education priorities*** *with School[PLUS] in a manner that is inclusive of Aboriginal communities.*

## *Summary*

For its 2005-2007 priorities report, AEPAC reviewed developments and internal and external changes that impact on education. The committee explored how it might continue to influence future actions that require concerted attention. In considering the scope of its mandate, the AEPAC recommendations encompass provincial and national developments, emphasize the importance of student success, and aim to support teachers in assessing the structures and resources needed to sustain change.

The committee embraces its shared responsibility to establish respect for Indigenous knowledge, to champion developments in Aboriginal languages, and to build broad understanding of the role of Elders in education. In its review of both the potential and challenges apparent in the educational community, AEPAC remains "*fixed on children*" and insists that the criteria for establishing priorities must emphasize student self-esteem and identity as paramount.

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The stream of Aboriginal education development and of improvement in Aboriginal student success is gathering strength. The flow is deepening and widening as many tributaries merge into a fast paced and powerful river. The Elders tell us that every stream reaches the ocean just as surely as one day each child will experience success. The flow of change is inevitable. Our challenge is to direct the current, to overcome obstacles and to avoid dangerous eddies. Our courage and renewed energy comes from the teachings of the Elders and we are sustained by the support of all.

# *Appendices*

## Aboriginal Education Priorities for 2005

AEPAC's *Action Plan 2000-2005* contains 17 recommendations. Nineteen further priorities for 2005-07 are summarized here:

### 1. Cultural Affirmation and School Climate

**Priorities:**

- **Support the development of teacher confidence** in actualizing Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives.
- **Expand and improve Saskatchewan Aboriginal teacher education programs** to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers.
- **Develop mutual pride and respect** in students.
- **Manage transitions holistically** to improve student retention.
- **Partner with business and community for student employment planning** as one aspect of life long learning.
- **Identify success factors** for mathematics and the sciences.

### 2. Shared Decision-making

**Priorities:**

- **Strengthen school boards** through enabling legislation and opportunities to share positive experience. Strategies to obtain Aboriginal representation on boards must be identified and implemented.
- **Provide partnership models, guidelines and policy** that reflect present day community realities.
- **Strengthen school community relations** for parental and student participation and community involvement.
- **Review regulatory systems** to achieve greater parity and potential for professional exchange.
- **Support professional development** and capacity building at the school level.

### 3. Curriculum Actualization

**Priorities:**

- **Build administrator and teacher commitment and capacity** to integrate Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in all areas of study as intended.
- **Develop policy with provincial educational partners** requiring all high school graduates to have a minimum of one Native Studies credit within the current 24-credit requirement, giving them a basic knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and their history.
- **Facilitate development** of and access to practical and accurate instructional and learning resources.
- **Design comprehensive plans** to chart progress in Aboriginal languages and culture programs in schools and classrooms.
- **Strengthen policy** to support teacher education programs and university course development that includes Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives.

### 4. Life Long Learning

**Priorities:**

- **Structure a community of learning** aimed at adoption of Aboriginal educational thought and practice.
- **Set instructional certification standards** appropriate to the demands of Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogy.
- **Prepare a comprehensive report** on Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan.

### 5. School$^{PLUS}$

**Priorities:**

- **Imbed and integrate Aboriginal education priorities** with School$^{PLUS}$ in a manner that is inclusive of Aboriginal communities.

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